

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

REPORT

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INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Korea

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SUBJECT North Korean Opium Production

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1. The North Korean government granted legal permission for the cultivation of opium in Kilchu (129-20, 40-58), Myongchon (129-28, 41-12), Samsu (128-02, 41-18), and Kapsan (128-17, 41-05) after taking over opium fields there formerly used by the [redacted]. Permission was usually granted to experienced cultivators of opium and especially the "hwachonmin",* whom the North Korean government was trying to eliminate as a class of people.
2. The application was made through the local police station, and permission granted by the Internal Affairs Department or the Agriculture and Forestry Department of the local people's committee. Documents necessary for the application were a "hwachonmin" record, photograph, and record as an experienced cultivator. The permit issued was good for one year.
3. The opium seed was provided by the Special Products Section of the Agriculture Department of the local people's committee, and fertilizer was rationed according to the area. Theseeds were planted about 20 May each year and cared for until June. In July, when the flower buds were out, the liquid was taken from the buds with knives. The milky-white liquid became brown after 10 days and dried to a black gum under the sun.
4. Approximately 330 ounces of opium were produced from one tanpo** of land. During July and August, government officials always inspected the fields to check the amount of liquid produced each day. In September, when the cultivation was finished, 70 percent of the opium was collected by the government, with the police in attendance. The remaining 30 percent was bought by the Opium Purchasing Office of the North Korean government.
5. The money paid the opium cultivators was not sufficient for them to live on all year, so the cultivators found methods to hide opium buds until the end of the season, and until after the police had checked their houses four or five times

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25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

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hunting for illegal buds. After the police inspections, the cultivators made their own opium and took it to nearby towns to sell. Usually inn and boarding house operators acted as a middle man for the sales, receiving a commission (size unstated) for their services. Illegal opium was not only smuggled between towns in Korea but over the border into Manchuria.

6. Illegal cultivation of opium was also carried on, although it is a difficult process, because of the long period of time that it must be hidden from the police. Cultivators would go into the most inaccessible places in mountains and remain for the entire period. About 20 percent of the well-to-do inhabitants of the opium-producing areas used opium.
7. Opium was carried illegally in shoes, under hats, and in clothing. Local opium dealers would take their products to Chongjin, where the large-scale smugglers would take it for transfer into Manchuria. The large-scale smugglers preferred severe border controls, since the less experienced smugglers would be captured, leaving more territory for the more experienced smugglers to work in.
8. "Imitation opium" was made by diluting good quality flour, generally an American product, with cold water. When the flour hardened the cake was washed with cold water until it became pure white, and then about one third raw opium was added to make the "imitation opium."

* Comment. The "hwachonmin" (火田民) were a class of people who cultivated land they obtained by burning down forests and moving each year to a different part of the country. A great many of these lived in North Hamgyong Province before the war.

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** Comment. One tanpo equals .245 acres.

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